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THOUGHTS
ON
NATIONAL EDUCATION.

By LORD LYTTELTON.

LONDON:
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

1855.

LONDON: PRINTED BY W. CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET,
AND CHARING CROSS.

NATIONAL EDUCATION.

AN analogy has been suggested between the position in which the question of National Education has for some time stood, and that of the question of relief to the destitute during the period of tentative legislation which preceded the enactment of the compulsory statutes at the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

This analogy seems, in a certain sense, correct. It seems probable that the present generation may see the establishment of compulsory education in schools; and it will on the whole be well if such a measure be followed by as much good and as little evil as the famous statutes above referred to.

It is in the anticipation of such a measure, and in the belief that it ought to be of a character at once more stringent, more simple, and more free, than has yet been proposed, that I venture to add a few observations to the many that have been offered to the country on this subject.

The ground of the above-mentioned comparison is obvious. The alleviation of distress, and prevention of destitution, are among the first and plainest moral duties inculcated by the Christian religion. In the earlier ages of our history they were performed voluntarily, however imperfectly, and as incidents of the feudal and monastic systems. It is needless to

refer to the well-known order of events which undermined and weakened the efficacy of that voluntary principle through a long course of years ending with the sixteenth century. The Legislature of this country seems to have striven as long as it could against the inevitable admission of that system of compulsory maintenance of the poor, which on the one hand is most dangerous to their own virtue, and on the other is wholly alien from that principle of religious charity in the giver, of which the very essence is his own free choice. But inevitable it was, unless still greater and more certain evils were to be allowed to remain and increase.

So it is now with education; the incidence of the moral obligation, however, being here in the first instance on parents, instead of the community at large. It is of course the first duty of Christian parents to provide for the teaching and training of their children. It may further be assumed as the general rule that it is their duty, in the state in which this country is and probably always will be, to provide for it, in the case of children of certain ages, by sending them to school. And when parents, from want of ability or want of enlightenment, do not do this, it is the duty of others more able and more enlightened to persuade and to help them to do it.

Proceeding on these truisms, Parliament and the country have for some time been engaged, in various ways, in stimulating, encouraging, and aiding the right feeling and benevolence of the people to establish and maintain schools, and fill them with scholars. This attempt has met with considerable

success, and will no doubt meet with still more ; but it will assuredly fall very far short of the necessity of the case.

I am not, however, about to reason in favour of the *principle* of compulsory education. There are quite facts enough, and arguments enough, before the public on this point. My object is, assuming that the principle will hereafter be admitted, to advert to a few of the details that would require attention in its practical application.

First, it would seem to follow, contrary to what has often been maintained, that education should not be gratuitous to any class as such, but that all should be required to pay for it. We compel parents to it, because it is a duty which they owe to society. They should therefore, when they can, bear its necessary charges.

The analogy of the Poor Law may be again resorted to. Sir John Pakington has lately said that, as the law of England declares that no one shall be destitute, so it ought to declare that no one (no child) shall be ignorant. But let the parallel be carefully adhered to. The law compels every one, as far as it can possibly be done, to supply his own physical wants from his own resources ; and will allow to no one the practical right to gratuitous relief without the most jealous inquiry in order to satisfy its administrators that he *cannot* provide for himself. This is in order to keep off the ever-threatening evil of the advance of pauperism. Now pauperism is the casting upon the community a legal charge by tax, for the supply of that which we are in duty bound to provide for ourselves. And free education is moral

pauperism, just as free relief is physical pauperism. It is no more just or politic, if it can be avoided, that ratepayers should pay for the schooling of a child, than that they should pay for the dinner of that child.

The principle then seems clear, that *primâ facie* every one should be required to bear this burden. Exemptions there must be, to be allowed in individual cases upon careful scrutiny of *each* such case. In doing this there seems no serious difficulty ; but it is part of the practical question of the actual meaning of the establishment of a compulsory system. To a few general remarks on this I now venture to proceed.

I suggest that such a system should be of the simplest kind. Let it be made a punishable offence for any parent or guardian not to send to school, and keep there, any child of a given age ; let them be required to pay a certain sum for the schooling of such children ; and let them choose freely what school it shall be.

As, in the former case, it would be only the general rule that parents should be required to pay, reasonable exemptions being allowed, so it would be here. There may be many reasons which should excuse a parent from sending a child to school ; but these would not interfere with the establishment of the general principle.

Considered in this manner, it seems an advantage to this suggestion that its principle has been already recognised and adopted in the well-known provision of the Factory laws which makes the employment of certain children conditional *on their attending some*

*school.** It is plain that in an essential point of view this is the same principle. *All* children are not directed to be sent to school: but virtually a compulsion is exercised, with such exceptions as must always occur, on all the children in a certain district, and in a certain sphere of labour. For of course it is sufficient in this question to consider the case of the labouring classes, in respect of which alone any serious difficulties have to be encountered.

Assuming, then, as before, that in the abstract compulsion in this matter is right, it will probably be found that the practical objections which may be imagined against such a law as I suggest must equally apply to this provision of the Factory Acts, and indeed that many of them have been advanced in discussion, and have been overcome in practice. *Solvitur ambulando.*

1. It may be objected that such a compulsory system would interfere too much with the labour-market. This has been noticed by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools.† Now it is well known how earnestly and frequently this objection was pressed against the whole of the recent legislation about factories, and in particular against the provision concerning education: and how entirely the apprehensions entertained have been dissipated under the working of the Acts. So it would be in the country generally.

Moreover, it should be observed that the plan proposed by no means requires that the child should be wholly at school and not at work. The analogy of

* 7 & 8 Vict. ch. 15, sec. 38.

† Report of the Rev. H. W. Bellairs, Minutes of the Committee of Council for Education for 1853, p. 79.

the Factory laws may be followed in this detail as well as in the principle. The child's time may be divided, in any proportion that may seem advisable, between the school and the work out of school. And this is only according to what has already been done under the authority of the Committee of Privy Council, by the short but important Minute of 29th April, 1854. The object of that Minute, as therein stated, is to allow of a system of half-time in schools generally. And in principle, and I believe as construed by the Committee, that Minute admits of other *bonâ fide* divisions of time besides an exactly equal one, provided they are arranged on a fair and systematic method.

2. It may be said that we should be sometimes requiring an impossibility, for that some parents and guardians could not find a school to send their children to. Now, it is true that, though this difficulty has been wholly and successfully disregarded in the Factory laws, this is not necessarily conclusive, because it may be said that schools abound more in the districts to which that law applies than in others. But this is a very questionable allegation; and, as the general rule, I would venture to predict that the difficulty would practically be found to have hardly any existence. In these days there is scarcely a corner of the country where any parents *cannot*, if they will, find a school for their children. If there were such cases, they might for a time be reckoned among the exceptions to the system to which I have alluded. The legislation would necessarily be experimental; and it might be made to take effect, in given parts of the country, only after a certain time; and if it

were really to prove inapplicable in any districts, a ground might be considered to have been laid for further measures.

It is to be observed that, under a system of compulsory payment on the part of parents, as well as attendance on the part of the children, a considerable stimulus would be given to the establishment, support, and extension of schools. The churches and sects would be all put on their mettle, and would have a clear course and no favour. *Occupet extremum scabies.*

3. It may be said that the liberty given to parents to choose their own school would be excessive; that however it may be tolerated, it should not receive direct recognition and encouragement by the law, on account of the bad and objectionable character of some schools.

Now if this is put as a question of general principle, with reference to the duty of the State in the moral and religious teaching of children, it is too late to bring it forward. It is in fact part of the large and important, but somewhat obsolete, question, of the obligation of the State to support truth and discountenance error. I am not going into that question: merely stating my belief that no such line can in these days be drawn, and that no principle would be involved if the State, which now recognises and assists schools where every variety of teaching prevails, should take the further step of requiring that all children shall be sent to one or other of such schools.

Speaking as a Churchman, anxious for the prevalence of what I hold to be the truth, I will only

say that I believe such a system, of free competition among religious bodies in school-teaching, to be the most effectual towards that result of all that are within our reach. "Though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple."*

But if it is merely meant that such a system would be very *imperfect*, because of the *inefficient* character of so many schools, I fully admit it. In its immediate and direct effects, the system would of course leave schools as they now are, namely, very imperfect. But it would have a strong indirect effect in stimulating improvement in schools through existing influences; and even without it, the improvement of schools is a matter which may be properly left to the powerful agency which has for some years been brought to bear upon it, that of the Committee of Privy Council. With whatever alterations that machinery may from time to time receive, it may be safely said that a constant and judicious extension, and adaptation, of its powers and resources, is all that is needed for the *improvement* of schools when once established.†

The one great difficulty which has obstructed the efforts of the Committee of Council, that of the early

* Milton, Liberty of Unlicensed Printing.

† It has been sufficiently pointed out how strong a stimulus may be given to the improvement of schools by the introduction of the system, on which we appear to be just entering, of examination previous to admission to any office in the Civil Service. I allude to it chiefly in order to notice that the first suggestion of this system seems to have been in an able pamphlet, published some years ago by the Rev. Dr. Booth (Letter to the Marquis of Lansdowne, 1847), which perhaps has not received all the attention which it deserved.

withdrawal of children from school, would be put an end to under the compulsory system.

4. It is obvious to remark that the system, acting only on parents and guardians, would leave untouched that great number of children who have neither the one nor the other, and who, among the lower class, require the salutary influence of education to be provided *for* them more than any other. But it is needless to propound plans for them. It has long since been done : and all that is now needed is to act on what has been propounded, and to do everywhere what has been done partially. The whole outline and framework of Pauper Schools, and of Reformatory Schools for young criminals, may be considered substantially agreed upon among those who have attended to the subject. Many such schools have been most successfully established : and we can only wonder and lament that session after session of Parliament should be allowed to pass without some more effective and comprehensive legislation on these subjects, especially on that of Pauper Education.*

Into one or other of such schools all children of the lower class, destitute of parental care, should be received.

5. The establishment, however, of pauper schools (by which I mean a district school in each union, under the Acts 7th & 8th Vict. ch. 101, and 11th & 12th Viet. ch. 82) would probably be found an essential part of the plan ; namely, for the reception, not only of the children now in the workhouse schools, for whose case the Acts were framed, but of all those

* See Note at the end.

whose parents should be exempted from payment. To this extent the principle of the liberty of choice of a school must be infringed, as it is now. The parent of a child in the workhouse has no option : that child must attend the workhouse school ; and, as I contended above, every one who *cannot* pay for the schooling of his children, and throws it upon public funds, is therefore a *pauper*, and should be provided for accordingly. He cannot send his child to any school he pleases, because (by hypothesis) that child is not paid for, and the schoolmaster is not to be forced to teach for nothing. Nor under such a system could schools in general be supported by a rate, as is too obvious to need explanation. But the central district school is so supported now ; and that would be, as it is now generally, the only free school in the district.*

6. The points of detail as to the management of such a system are numerous, but I do not propose to go into them. My belief is, that none of them would present any insuperable difficulty. According to modern practice, the management would be local, under central supervision. It would be for the local managers, whoever they might be, to keep lists of all the children within their districts of the school age ; to ascertain that the law was complied with as regards them, and to enforce it ; and to investigate and regulate the exemptions from payment that might be allowed in certain cases, and consequent admissions of some of the children to the district schools.

It seems probable that the number of parents exempted, under a careful administration of the law,

* See Note at the end.

would be by no means so large as might be imagined. In the great majority of cases the poor *can* pay for the schooling of their children, and they *would* do it if required by the law. An "old water-cress man," one of the very lowest class of the London poor, told Mr. Mayhew that he always had sent his two children to school, paying twopence a-week regularly.*

It is of course to be remembered that the aid of the charitable, now so frequently given to enable the poor to send their children to school, would be no less available under the proposed system, and indeed would be greatly stimulated by it. Of course, also, all admissions to endowed schools of any kind—in fact, all privileges of free education depending on *charity*—would remain just as they are. No law could prevent a poor person from receiving such aid, nor is it required by any principle. Pauperism is not the relation of a poor man to a voluntary benefactor, whether of the present or of a former generation, but, as was said, the legal right to tax the existing community, willing or not, for a charge which, if possible, he himself ought to bear. And it would no doubt be often found that the parents received help either in whole or in part from their richer neighbours towards their school expenses.

I would add, with respect to management, that, though reasonable objection has been made to the constitution of bodies similar to Boards of Guardians, for the actual administration of schools, yet none but the most ordinary qualifications would be needed for such simple duties as have been indicated above.

I do not pretend either that such a system would

* Mayhew's 'London Labour and the London Poor,' i. 151.

be infallibly effectual in attaining its own objects, or that those objects are all that we could wish to arrive at. But I believe that it would be more practicable, and attended with fewer disadvantages, than any other that can be suggested. Any other system, it would seem, must involve the establishment and support of schools out of a general rate, and their administration by some legally constituted bodies. The one great difficulty which has hitherto impeded all attempts to found such a system, is the religious difficulty. My belief is that that difficulty is wholly insuperable, except by some method which shall involve objectionable principles: and I will venture before concluding to add some remarks on this point.

Any national system for the establishment of schools must be supported by public funds or rates; and the first point to be observed is, that from the necessity of the case, though contrary to the wishes of most of the advocates of such a system, the operation of it would tend to the gradual extinction of all schools maintained by voluntary efforts. It is needless to dwell on this point, which has been much argued of late. Every one knows that the erection, and, much more, the support, of schools, is a matter of constant toil and difficulty; and schools supported, on easy conditions, out of an abundant fund provided by law, would have such an advantage over others that the two could never co-exist for any length of time.

I am not stating this as an abstract objection. To the bare principle of a school-rate, to which all should contribute who can, it seems difficult to sustain any opposition.

But the religious difficulty at once occurs. To meet it, one proposal is that schools should be had in which secular instruction alone shall be given, leaving religious teaching to the voluntary efforts, out of school, of the different communions.

I say secular instruction *alone*. I am aware that in some of these schemes there is a provision, taken apparently from the laws of Massachusetts, for the inculcation of certain moral virtues as part of the school-business. But the distinction to be drawn is between secular teaching and Christian teaching; and no one pretends that this little list of moralities is in any particular sense Christian. They are very good as far as they go; but they are to be found in Plato, or Seneca, or Plutarch, quite as well as anywhere else.

Now there are certain words, "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth," which may well suggest misgivings as to a scheme which carefully provides the one of these, and leaves the other to take its chance. But still I should be disposed to say that, if it was only a question of teaching this or that, such a scheme might be admitted. Mr. Carlyle, addressing what he calls "Churchism and Dissenterism," says, in his inimitable style, "Out on ye, ye owlets! is darkness necessary for your purposes?"* and I think it may be allowed that, in the present state of feeling in this country, the different religious bodies would to a very great extent supply religious teaching under the system in question.

But this view wholly overlooks the most important

* Carlyle on Chartism. I am not sure of the exact words, being obliged to quote from memory.

part of the subject. If a machinery could be contrived by which a number of teachers should go about the country and instruct the children in every house in useful knowledge, it might be well. But no one looks upon a school as merely a place where knowledge, of any kind, is imparted. The main object of school-education, as of all education, is moral training and discipline : the formation of character. How is *this* to be done without religion ? *How* is an earnest man, who believes that Christianity is not *a* plan, but the only plan, the Divine plan, for the renovation of mankind, even to set about training children on any but a religious basis ?

In an article in a newspaper, some time ago, this point was touched upon, and it was simply asked, "Why cannot we have moral training without religious teaching ?" No answer was given. The acute writer knew perfectly well that in this question he was slurring over the chief part of the subject.

Some modifications, then, of the secular system are attempted. One is that by which a certain generalized view of Christianity is adopted on which all sects are supposed to agree, as comprehending all that is essential in it, and all besides is rejected as sectarian and non-essential : and this general scheme of doctrine is to be taught in the school. Now, without taking the extreme case of certain sects, of which the names will at once occur to every one, this system seems to proceed upon a very untenable view of what the New Testament is. What are these non-essential parts of it ? For instance, is the 8th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans one of them ? If there are

such, what is the use of them? For what object were they written under the Divine inspiration? I once heard of a worthy man, an Alderman of London, who said the Sermon on the Mount was worth all the rest of the New Testament. But if so, *cui bono* all the rest? *

Indeed, these "sectarian" doctrines seem to be often spoken of as troublesome superfluities, to be enforced upon no one; and this perhaps is the only consistent view, on this side of the question.

To recur to the question of moral training. I do not wish to do more than allude to specific religious topics; but I desire to know *how* a member of the Church of England at least, is to conduct such training except in reference to such doctrines as these: the corruption of human nature, the aid of the Holy Spirit, and the means by which that aid is to be sought for and applied? And is it not plain that these are among the deepest and most controverted points in the Gospel?

We come, then, to the celebrated rule, of which so much has been heard of late years, under which schools are left as they are with respect to their religious teaching, but it is required that no child shall be taught any religious formulary to which its parents or guardians object.

I am bound to speak with some reserve on this point (and indeed on the last-named system also), as I have never seen the actual working of any school so conducted. But nevertheless I will venture to

* See Palmer on the Church, Chap. v. Appendix, on the Doctrine of Fundamentals; Whately, Essay on the Difficulties in St. Paul's Writings, pp. 42-55, 6th edition.

submit a few considerations which seem to me to arise from the very nature of the case.

For convenience I will suppose the case of a Church-of-England school, conducted by a sincere and intelligent member of that Church.

1. The rule, as undoubtedly is very often the case, may never be put into action. No parents or guardians may make such an objection as is supposed. Considering the professed differences of creeds, this may suggest some curious questions as to the value which dissidents from the Church sometimes put upon their distinctive doctrines. But this is immaterial for the present purpose. In the absence of any restriction, all the children in the school must be treated alike; namely, must be trained *to be children of the Church*. Nothing else *can* be done by such a master as I have supposed. This must be the *principle* with regard to all. The application might not always be the same. For instance, an unbaptized child could not be dealt with as if it were baptized. In such a case, the teacher can only deal with the child as in a state of preparation *for* baptism.

In these circumstances the rule is in fact a nullity, and to be disregarded.

2. It is possible that there are some nominally Church Schools, in which the teaching is uniform from the opposite reason to that just noticed; not because no parents object to certain formularies, but because the formularies are not used. But this could not be the case under such a master as I have supposed; and in fact the case becomes one of generalized teaching of Christianity, such as has above been considered.

3. Lastly, the rule may be in operation *bonâ fide*, as far as possible, and certain children withdrawn from some specified parts of the religious teaching. But, by the supposition, they remain subject to all the rest, and to the general discipline of the school. How are these to be applied? No doubt it would be a great disadvantage to any teacher, in his religious instruction, to be debarred from the use of the invaluable forms of words provided for him. But how is he to avoid teaching according to their substance?

He reads the Bible without restriction, with all the children. It is true that, according to some systems, this is to be bare reading, without comment. Surely, of all the absurdities which these questions have engendered, this notion of reading the Bible without explaining it, in educating a child, is among the greatest. Did any human being ever do so with his own children?

And if the Bible is *taught*, how can it be so except according to the meaning and spirit of the excluded formulary?

Again, with reference to what has been so often mentioned, the moral discipline of the school. Two of the children are not to be taught, that is, not in the words by which the Catechism teaches it, that their nature is of itself inclined to evil. But unless, in some words or other, this is taught to them, how is a master, such as I have described, to make rewards and punishments intelligible to the conscience of these children?

It seems to me, then, that this famous rule must inevitably either be a nullity—or must be a mere delusion and blind upon those who are intended to

avail themselves of it—or must lead to something much beyond what it professes to intend, to the *general* lowering of the doctrinal teaching of our schools. And, perhaps, I should mainly object to its general prevalence on account of the constant tendency it must have to produce, more and more, this last-named result. The inconvenience of such distinctions, among children in the same schools, would continually tempt school-managers to get rid of it by avoiding “doctrinal peculiarities,” and would have a strong effect upon the character of the master of the school.

It is not my wish to speak with disrespect of systems which undoubtedly, in one form or another, have spread and are spreading very largely through countries inhabited by people of British origin, while they are hardly known in any others. But let us look at their result in that country where they have had the fullest development—in the United States of America. There, as it appears, all popular belief in a fixed and unchangeable body of revealed truth, as that which mankind are required to hold, is almost entirely destroyed.* I am aware that there are many who see no great harm in this. But it is not to them that I am addressing myself.

On these grounds I deprecate all these attempts in school-education, by which religion is excluded, or is

* Mr. Tremenhare (Notes on Public Subjects during a Tour in Canada and the United States) adduces strong evidence to this fact, though he gives no absolute opinion of his own. Mr. Godley’s testimony (Letters from America, ii, pp. 224, 225) is singularly positive and clear. There is nothing inconsistent with it in the interesting collection lately published by Mr. Twisleton (Evidence as to the Religious Working of the Common Schools of Massachusetts, 1855).

compromised. By all means let those who approve of them have full scope for their exertions. Let them have their share of the public funds, to which they have contributed. All this is according to established principle and practice, which no one wishes to disturb. But let not the enormous power of the State be applied to establish a general system which would absorb every other into itself, and which would greatly weaken the hold which this Church and people still retain on a definite body of religious truth.

I have only a few words to add, on an objection which very naturally suggests itself: namely, that in the schools which now exist for the children of the lowest class of the population, such as Union District Schools and Reformatory Schools, and which I propose to extend, the rule above-mentioned, of not enforcing formularies which are objected to by parents, always prevails. But the fact is, as has often been pointed out, that such schools are below the region of these controversies.* At Norwood, for example, the oldest and perhaps still the best of the District Schools, I believe it would be found that the objection in question has never been made. So it would be throughout; or it would be so seldom made as to be of no practical consequence. The case would be that above considered, under the first head relating to the effect of this rule. And from the provisions of the Act constituting District Schools,†

* See, for instance, Mr. M. D. Hill's answer to Question 631 in the Evidence before the House of Commons' Committee on Criminal Juveniles (Report, 24th June, 1852). Mr. Hill is speaking of young criminals; but what he says is equally true of all children of the lowest class.

† See 7 & 8 Vict. ch. 101, sect. 43.

and the general character of our Parochial Unions and Boards of Guardians, I do not disguise my belief that in the vast majority of cases these schools, depending on the character of their managers and their masters, would practically be Church Schools. Nor do I believe that this result would cause dissatisfaction among the Dissenting communions. It is one of the few remaining prerogatives of the Established Church, that, in her character as such, it is not grudged to her that she should have the care of those lowest and most helpless beings whose charge, failing those to whom it should naturally belong, the State is compelled to provide for.

N O T E.

I did not happen to see, till I had written the above, the Bill before Parliament for the better education of poor children. It does not appear inconsistent with anything I have proposed; but I did not anticipate its provisions, because they proceed upon a principle which I did not suppose Parliament would agree to, though I make no objection to it. It simply authorizes the Guardians to pay for the schooling of any pauper's child, at any approved school which the said pauper may prefer. That is, *pro tanto* it enables 'denominational' schools to be maintained out of the rates. It does not interfere with the compulsory principle, nor with the compulsory payment where practicable: for a pauper, unable to maintain his children, *à fortiori* is unable to pay for them at school.







